

1984-85: Lesbian and Gay Miners' Support Group



A short history of the Lesbian and Gay Miners' Support Group, who were set up during the 1984-85 miners' strike and, as a result, challenged prejudices held by many in the labour movement.

Before the miners' strike it would have been very hard to imagine a miners' minibus running around Dulais Valley in South Wales with the slogan on its doors and dashboard saying, 'This vehicle was donated by the Lesbians' and Gay men's miners' support group.'

In fact by February 1985 there were eleven lesbians' and gay men's miners' support groups all over the country. Six of them replied to our survey.

By December 1984 the London group alone had collected over £11,000 by a mixture of pub, club and street collections, benefits, parties and other events. The highlight event was undoubtedly the 'Pits and Perverts' gig at the Electric Ballroom where Bronski Beat headed the bill; it raised £5,650. At the benefit David Donovan, a South Wales miner, said:

"You have worn our badge, "Coal not Dole", and you know what harassment means, as we do. Now we will pin your badge on us, we will support you. It won't change overnight, but now 140,000 miners know that there are other causes and other problems. We know about blacks, and gays, and nuclear disarmament. And we will never be the same."

The existence and activity of the various groups proves that many lesbians and gay men do support the miners. As the Southampton group remarked in their response to our survey:

"Our best personal experiences were meeting miners who came to the city from Abercynon. After coming down here repeatedly and meeting politically active socialists, seeing them collect money, food and clothing and generally working in support of the strikers, their attitudes were forced to change just by their own experiences, because they know we are just ordinary people, and people who support their struggle [...] They've had to change a lot of their attitudes and as is said so often, things will never be the same again."

Formation and activities

The Lesbians' and gay men's miners' support groups responding to our survey were formed later than the other groups were. The London group was the first to be set up in July 1984, and started with 11

members. Six months later it had grown to 50. Responding to our questionnaire they said that the formation of the group was 'one of the most important positive developments in London's Lesbian and gay community in 1984.'

The Lothian Lesbian & Gay Miners Support Group was set up two months later in September 1984 with 12 members raising £40 a week for the White Craige strike centre in East Lothian.

Lesbians Against Pit Closures, London, followed in November 1984, involving more than 20 women. They collected £50 a week for the Rhodisia Women's Action Group, Worksop, and said: 'Women's activities in the strike are obviously a major influence on us.' The lesbians' and gay men's support for the miners has received a fair amount of good coverage in the left-wing and trade union press. At the lesbians' and gay men's 'fringe meeting', attended by some 250 people, at the October 1984 Labour Party conference, the NUM, who dominated the conference, sent the following message of support:

"Support civil liberties and the struggle of lesbian and gay people. We welcome the links formed with South Wales and other areas. Our struggle is yours. Victory to the miners."

And the Notts Women's Support Groups, to whom the London Lesbians and Gay Men Support the Miners Group gave £250 in December 1984, wrote:

"I am writing on behalf of the Notts Women's Support Group to express to you our gratitude for the support and solidarity you have shown in forming the Lesbians & Gay Men Support the Miners Group. We also extend to you our total solidarity and support in your struggle against all forms of oppression and prejudice on the grounds of sexuality. Our struggles are part and parcel of the same fight. In particular we are deeply grateful that you have consistently kept us informed as to your activities and have materially contributed to support groups in order that the dispute can continue to victory."

This article was taken from the [Hayes People's History](#) website and can be found [here](#).